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# THE GERMAN NAVY AND ENGLAND.

BY A GERMAN NAVAL EXPERT.

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It is little known in Germany, and probably not at all in other countries, that three decades before the first German Naval Act became valid a plan was already in existence for the formation of a Prussian navy. In 1873, soon after the German Empire was founded, this programme for the new Imperial navy was approved. It provided for the building of twenty-three battleships, twenty cruisers, six despatch boats, eighteen gunboats, twenty-eight torpedo-boats, etc. Its object was stated to be the protection of the German commerce and the defence of the German coasts. Germany's efforts, therefore, to possess an effective navy for the protection of her marine interests are by no means of a recent date; they are, moreover, absolutely free from aggressive motives. Adverse party conditions in the Imperial Diet brought it about that, during the next twenty-five years, no permanent practical results issued from these efforts. There was also a lack of men who knew how to transform the naval ideas of the German people into facts.

This changed under the reign of Emperor William II. The first Naval Act of 1898 was passed by the Diet, and now the execution in modern vessels of the naval programme of 1873 was assured at last. Like the original plan, the Act of 1898 was not based upon a comparison with the navies of other countries, but only tactical reasons, as well as reasons of organization, were decisive in fixing the number and types of the vessels. It provided for the building of a double squadron of ships of the line, in all nineteen battleships, twelve large and thirty small cruisers. The rapidly growing naval interests of the German Empire, however, had scarcely been taken into account, and it soon became evident that a navy must be built which would not only be able to make a blockade of the German coasts impossible, but prevent it

altogether. The Spanish-American war, Fashoda, the South-African war, the unreasonable holding up of German mailsteamers and, finally, the extension of her colonial possessions in the years from 1898 to 1900 further awakened Germany to the fact that, under existing conditions, there was only one means of protecting her navigation and her colonies—viz., the possession of a battle fleet strong enough to render war with Germany so dangerous even for the most powerful adversary at sea that the latter's supremacy would be at stake. An attempt has been made in England to misrepresent this purely defensive object of the German Naval Act of 1900, and to attribute to it an aggressive tendency; the suggestion was that Germany intended to build a navy which would enable her to attack successfully the most powerful nations. Whoever has read Mahan intelligently knows that for such an undertaking against Great Britain's immense fleet a navy different from that provided for by the German Naval Act of 1900 would be necessary. The execution of this law, again conceived according to principles of tactics as well as of organization, will increase the number of vessels to thirty-eight battleships, fourteen large and thirty-eight small cruisers. For tactical reasons it was thought desirable to form two squadrons of eight vessels each, with two in reserve.

This naval programme is to be completely carried out by 1920. In fact, it has been and still is the first planned in Germany after the temporary modernization of the old naval plan (Act of 1898). The bills of 1906 and 1908, though on account of technical progress more costly, did not contain anything essentially new.

In 1906 only the six large cruisers for service abroad, which had already been included in the bill of 1900, but which the Diet then had refused to grant, were asked for. At that time the Government had demanded also seven small cruisers, which met with the same fate in the Diet, and the Government did not insist upon these later on. The original and now legally fixed number of vessels, however, has not been changed during the last nine years. Taking into consideration the irresistible progress in modern ship construction and in the efficiency of arms, it is only natural that the German navy should have steadily increased in quality. On the other hand, the course taken by England has largely contributed to this end. Germany, since the new period

of shipbuilding, had for financial reasons, and in accordance with the dimensions of her shipyards, restricted herself as much as possible regarding the size of her battleships and cruisers, and in this respect had remained within the limit of what was absolutely necessary when compared with the navies of other countries. The building of the "Dreadnought," however, and the great display made in England regarding this vessel, rendered Germany's former attitude impossible. Other nations, too, were now compelled to build larger battleships.

It was, therefore, historically as well as materially incorrect when assertions were made in the English Parliament that Germany's shipbuilding policy had forced Great Britain to increase her navy. Germany, on the contrary, had waited longest of all the great sea powers in introducing the "Dreadnought" and "Invincible" type.

The object of the naval bill of 1908 was the elimination of a mistake in the Naval Act concerning the life of the battleships. The Government, when introducing the bill, had intended to legally establish a duration of twenty-five years, with the understanding that the substituting vessels would be ready for use at the end of those twenty-five years. The Diet, however, had thought this period to be meant for the *granting of the construction* of the substituting vessels, extending thus the real duration to about thirty years, since the exceeding five years would be necessary for the preparation of the plans and the building proper. In case the supposition of the Diet were to be accepted, the duration of the vessels had to be reduced from twenty-five to twenty years, and this reduction actually formed the contents of the supplementary law of 1908.

It so happened that quite a number of ships were built twenty years ago, the substitutes of which were or are due in 1908, 1909 and 1910. While formerly two battleships a year had been built, this number was consequently to be raised to three in the years mentioned.

The scaremongers in England saw in this a general acceleration of German shipbuilding and tried to prove thereby Germany's intention of wresting naval supremacy from Great Britain.

The following list, taken from the Naval Act, shows that the pace in naval construction will slow down again in Germany beginning with 1912:

Year.	Battleships to be built.	Large cruisers to be built.
1908.....	3	1
1909.....	3	1
1910.....	3	1
1911.....	3	1
1912.....	1	1
1913.....	1	1
1914.....	1	1
1915.....	1	1
1916.....	1	1
1917.....	1	1

That the German Government does not intend to put forth a new naval programme in 1912, as has been rumored in England, is evident from the definite statements made by the Imperial Chancellor and the Secretary of the German Navy in the Imperial Diet.

It cannot, then, be denied that a uniform and consistent spirit pervades the German Naval Act and its subsequent logical amendments, that its aim is to prevent wars rather than to win them. It well becomes a people which, in spite of military supremacy and many inducements and provocations to the contrary, has been for thirty-eight years the safeguard of peace to Europe.

Many foreign countries have long ago observed that Germany's extraordinary success in promptly supplying her navy with ships and crews is the logical outcome of her naval programme. It is, therefore, surprising, but none the less a fact, that such a recognition, on the part of England, is of but recent date and can be traced only from the time when Germany decided to build vessels of the "Dreadnought" type. Across the Channel the German Naval Act had until then been frequently called the "paper programme" of the German Admiralty. More recently, however, a complete change has taken place, and the strength of the German navy has been of late much overestimated and its development greatly exaggerated. During the naval debates in the House of Commons this spring assertions were made and views advanced which showed not only an astonishing lack of authentic information in England, but also a remarkable disregard of official German statements. It became evident then that much confusion exists in Great Britain regarding both the spirit of the German Naval Act and the fiscal and parliamentary conditions of the Empire, and furthermore that for party reasons facts were readily ignored.

Of this there can be no other interpretation. In London,

during the sessions from March 17th to 20th, even from the Treasury Bench figures were cited regarding the future strength of the German navy, the attainment of which is absolutely excluded by the Naval Act.

This law, it must be remembered, is entirely public, and the execution of its annual provisions depends wholly upon the appropriations of the Imperial Diet passed in open session. The First Lord of the Admiralty based this year's naval bill providing for at least four battleships of the "Dreadnought" type, six protected cruisers and twenty torpedo-boat destroyers and, if possible, four additional large battleships upon the statement that a mistake had been made as to the capacity of the German shipyards and the possible or probable pace in shipbuilding. Germany, he asserted, could have ready for service in the spring of 1912 not thirteen "Dreadnoughts," as had been supposed, but more likely seventeen. Premier Asquith expressed himself similarly on this subject.

It is not at all of importance what the German shipyards are able to do, but what they are actually building and what will be performed by them in the near future. Former Imperial Chancellor Prince von Buelow and Secretary-of-the-Navy von Tirpitz both emphasized in the session of the Reichstag of March 29th that not seventeen large vessels, but only thirteen, will be built. This number, consisting of ten ships of the line and three armored cruisers, will, furthermore, not be ready for service in the spring, but only in the fall of 1912. Not a single vessel of the "Dreadnought" type has been completed in Germany at present. Until now only the battleships "Nassau," "Westfalen," "Rheinland" and "Posen" have been launched. "Nassau" and "Westfalen," the first German "Dreadnoughts," will not commence actual service until the fall of this year, the remaining two in the spring and fall, respectively, of 1910. The first German vessel of the "Invincible" type—viz., the large cruiser "von der Tann," was launched only on March 20th last. On slip are, furthermore, the three battleships, "Ersatz Oldenburg," "Ersatz Siegfried" and "Ersatz Beowulf," the large cruiser "G," and quite recently the battleship "Ersatz Frithjof"; the last named vessel in the Schichau yards at Danzig. The following list gives the programme for the building of the new battleships and the large cruisers, indicating also the number of "Dreadnoughts" and "Invincibles" possessed by Great Britain:

Time.	Germany. Ready for trial trips.		Total.	England. Ready.		Total.
	Battleships.	Armored cruisers.		Battleships.	Armored cruisers.	
1909						
Spring.....	..	..	..	4	3	7
Summer.....	..	..	..	4	3	7
Fall.....	2	..	2	4	3	7
Winter.....	2	..	2	6 <sup>1</sup>	3	9
1910						
Spring.....	4	..	4	7	3	10
Summer.....	4	1	5	7	3	10
Fall.....	4	1	5	7	3	10
Winter.....	4	1	5	8 <sup>2</sup>	4 <sup>3</sup>	12
1911						
Spring.....	4	1	5	8	4	12
Summer.....	7 <sup>1</sup>	2 <sup>1</sup>	9	10 <sup>4</sup>	4	14
Fall.....	7	2	9	12 <sup>5</sup>	4	16
Winter.....	7	2	9	12	4	16
1912						
Spring.....	8 <sup>2</sup>	3 <sup>2</sup>	11	16 <sup>6</sup>	4	20
Summer.....	8	3	11	16	4	20
Fall.....	8	3	11	16	4	20
Winter.....	10 <sup>3</sup>	3	13	16	4	20

*Germany.*—<sup>1</sup>Including ships of appropriation, 1908. <sup>2</sup>*Id.*, 1909. <sup>3</sup>Including two ships of appropriation, 1909.

*England.*—<sup>1</sup>Including "St. Vincent," December, 1909, "Collingwood," February, 1910. <sup>2</sup>Including "Neptune," January, 1911. <sup>3</sup>"Indefatigable," February, 1911. <sup>4</sup>Including two ships of appropriation, 1909, to be ordered in July, 1909. <sup>5</sup>Including two ships of appropriation, 1909, to be ordered in November, 1909. <sup>6</sup>Including four ships to be begun, probably, on April 1, 1910.

The battleship "Ersatz Frithjof" and the large cruiser "H," which is not even on slip yet, formed a prominent part in the English debates. Rumor had it that their building was ordered before being legally authorized, and this was said to prove the alleged secret acceleration of the shipbuilding in Germany, contrary to the terms of the naval programme. Secretary-of-the-Navy von Tirpitz expressed himself in the Reichstag with complete candor and at length on this subject. He explained, without reserve, that the contract for the building of these two vessels had been promised to two private shipyards purely for commercial reasons in order to obtain lower prices. The actual conclusion of the contract, of course, could not take place until after the naval appropriations for this year had been passed by the Imperial Diet. The time for delivery is, consequently, to be counted only from April 1st of this year, and the vessels will, therefore, not be completed any sooner than if no preliminary agreement had been made at all.

The German authorities also expressed themselves freely on the question of disarmament. Prince von Buelow, on March 29th, declared again emphatically that Germany did not intend to compete with Great Britain's naval force, nor to accelerate the execution of the German naval programme beyond its legal terms. He then stated that up to the present time there was no basis, practicable and just to all nations, for the negotiations on the limitation of armaments. Also in this question, he said, Germany's attitude was solely determined by motives of peace and for humane reasons. If Germany, the Chancellor concluded, continued now her reserve concerning this question, this could not be considered either remarkable or unfriendly to other powers.

The German authorities have made, regarding shipbuilding and disarmament, statements as candid, explicit and, at the same time, as reassuring as it was possible to make and as any one could desire. Nevertheless, nervous discussions of both topics continue in England, and Germany is still frequently referred to as the sole cause for alarm. There remains nothing to do, then, for Germany but to hope that soon a reaction may set in concerning these absolutely unfounded views. Every Englishman should recognize that his country has nothing to fear at all from Germany, so long as no attacks are made upon her national dignity and her independence. The immense strength of the English naval forces will then recur to him, exceeding that of Germany three and a half times. In the spring of 1912, moreover, England will have suffered no material loss of this enormous superiority.

England, of course, will gradually have to become accustomed to the fact that in the future other nations, too, will guard their interests at sea more than they were wont to guard them during the last century. Not only Germany, but still more the United States, France (planning the creation of a navy far surpassing that of Germany), Japan, Italy, Austria and Russia, are quite justified in expanding their navies. They will render it in the future impossible for England to maintain her present supremacy over all other navies, and especially over the combined two next strongest ones.

"The Shipping World," a reliable periodical published in London, recently estimated the percentage of strength of the larger navies as follows:



	1909.	1908.	1907.
Great Britain .....	41.9%	42.5%	42.4%
United States .....	14.9%	13.7%	13.8%
France .....	12.6%	12.6%	13.1%
Germany .....	12.1% <sup>1</sup>	12.7%	11.6%
Japan .....	8.0%	8.3%	9.1%
Italy .....	5.4%	5.2%	4.2%
Russia .....	5.1%	5.0%	5.8%

<sup>1</sup> The decline in Germany's share in 1909 is explained by the author's omitting the small armored coast cruisers of the "Siegfried" class, as for the most part they had approached the legal age limit.

On account of the enlargement of ship types which England herself has initiated, the costs for the building and preservation of vessels have risen more and more. This fact contributes greatly to the difficulty Great Britain is encountering in the maintenance of her present disproportionate, and therefore unnecessary, supremacy.

There can be no doubt, then, that all other nations put together are less to be blamed for the course matters have taken than England herself; and it must be considered neither correct nor fair to make Germany, and Germany alone, responsible for it. Taking into consideration the relative strength of the two countries, together with the present public excitement in England and the lessons English politics have taught during the last three centuries, it is Germany rather than Great Britain that is menaced. England is at present assembling 350 vessels on the River Thames. How, then, can Germany be called aggressive? England is the only country that is now able to attack Germany without risk to herself. Germany does not desire more,—nor has she ever intended to do more,—than to create such a risk. The navy, therefore, which she is building to serve this purpose can never justly be called an offensive, but only a defensive navy.

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